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C O N F I D E N T I A L ABUJA 001461

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: NIGERIA: ETHNIC CLASHES IN NASARAWA STATE CONTINUE SPORADICALLY

REF: ABUJA 1448

Classified by Ambassador Howard F. Jeter, reason 1.5 (B/D).

1. (U) Summary. Ethnic clashes in the Middle-Belt State of Nasarawa continue sporadically. Frightened citizens have fled the areas of conflict in the southeastern corner of the state, but the numbers are uncertain, and press reports may be inflated. Isolated fighting in the village of Tudun-Adegbo cost approximately 25 lives the evening of June 25. International Red Cross officials have sent a mission to assess the situation and expect to have better information within a day or two. End summary.

2. (C) Local press reports continue of clashes between rival ethnic groups in the southeast corner of Nasarawa State, a Middle-Belt State located immediately to the east of the Federal Capital Territory. Poloff spoke with Nasarawa Governor Abdullahi Adamu June 25 by telephone and received an update on the conflict. Adamu said that the uneasy peace established over the previous week-end had been broken by fighting the night of June 25 in the village of Tudun-Adegbo. Approximately 45 persons were admitted to local hospitals with injuries, and there were six confirmed deaths. He estimated the total loss of life from the fighting at 25. Governor Adamu said that he had requested reinforcements from the national police and expected their arrival shortly. Also reached by telephone June 26, the Deputy Commissioner of Police for Federal Operations confirmed the dispatch of three additional mobile police units to Nasarawa (approximately 60 men).

3. (C) Governor Adamu dismissed accounts of fighting in the State capital of Lafia, saying that the arrival of injured persons and "a few bodies" had caused "some disturbances," but that police on the scene had prevented any serious altercation. The conflict was confined entirely to two Local Government Areas (LGAs) of the southeast, he said. (Note: Nasarawa has 13 LGAs in total. End Note). Governor Adamu said he did not know the numbers of people who had fled their homes in the troubled areas, but that certainly there had been "many people leaving," particularly ethnic Tivs heading south to Benue State (where Tivs are a majority). He also said he had met with the Benue State Governor, George Akume to discuss the situation and work on "ways to lessen the tension."

4. (C) Poloff also spoke by telephone June 26 with the Director of the International Red Cross in Nigeria, Jean-Jacque Gacond, who said he had dispatched a Red Cross team to Makurdi, capital of Benue State, to assess the situation. Gacond said he thought that perhaps "some thousands" had fled their homes, but he had no hard figures. He discounted one press report of 35,000 displaced persons fleeing into makeshift camps in Benue State, saying the report was probably inflated. Gacond said he expected to have better information by June 27 or 28.

5. (C) Comment. Renewed fighting, even in isolated areas, obviously makes efforts by local officials at reconciliation (reftel) that much harder. We hope to have better information soon on the numbers of displaced persons and their present location. End comment.
Jeter